PAINTINGS

by

HENRI ROUSSEAU

"Le Douanier"

OCTOBER, 1926

ALEX. REID and LEFÈVRE, Ltd.

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FOREWORD

WITH infinite precautions, and after the greatest difficulties, the almost priceless works of the "Douanier" Rousseau have been gathered together and brought to England. To paint these pictures that have been found worthy of such manifest signs of esteem, Rousseau worked with all his might, sitting at the doors of the little *douanes*, that lies at the gates of Paris, on the slopes of the fortifications and by the dusty railings that mark the boundaries of the City. And now comes the historic moment—Henri Rousseau crosses the Channel. A gentle shade, and certainly now in the ranks of the blest, the poor old *douanier* has succeeded by the sheer force of his genius in obtaining an almost royal reception at the hands of the English customs.

As a *douanier*, a working man, on duty for six days in the week, Henri Rousseau had only Sunday to give to painting. Fifty-two times a year, when the church bells gave their joyful message to the world, he sat before his easel, remote from his last six days of work, and still more remote as a toiler on a day of rest. Neither mockery nor good-humoured contempt could lessen his confidence or abate his zeal. Born on a Sunday, his art bears the imprint of a frenzy of renunciation, the happiness of a free choice, a lofty faith in its own power. Like a peacock with jewelled plumage, his soul makes its obeisance before God and, before the phenomena of Nature, climbing with feverish exuberance over the narrow confines of family life. On a background of the dingy frontages of the Rue Parelle, amongst the insignificant or sinister figures of its inhabitants in all their squalor and their ugliness, he brings into being terrific realities and summer dreams, as men and things

strike his imagination. Caring not how others saw, he would reveal them, a flower worthy of their creation, grass and foliage and trees sent down from Heaven by God who had made them to glorify the earth.

Bearing, perhaps, a message of the future, I would ask the British public to receive the brusque assault of this new apparition thoughtfully and calmly, seeking where it touches the roots of the universal Equilibrium. I would ask of this public—so reasonable in its critical attitude—an extreme clearness of perception and, perhaps, in some degree, a realisation of the claims of Eternity.

ROCH GREY.

Neris, France, September 3rd, 1926.

INTRODUCTION

HENRI ROUSSEAU—called the "Douanier," on account of the profession he followed for many years—was born at Laval in 1844.

He took part in his youth in the campaign in Mexico, serving as a musician in the French army. There he became acquainted with the beauty of virgin forests, and the memory of them remained with him, vividly, all his life. Employed in the Paris *octroi* Rousseau occupied his leisure hours in painting. He retired in due course, and gave himself up entirely to the art he loved, but which, for lack of patrons, did not provide him with a living. His principal resources came from lessons in drawings, and the violin. It is hardly necessary to say that his pupils were recruited amongst his neighbours of as humble condition as his own. He exhibited regularly at the "Salon des Indépendants" from 1884 to 1910, and at the "Salon d'Automne" from 1903 to 1910.

"*The Life of Rousseau as we have to consider it here, was a passionate struggle for twenty-five years for the realisation of his conception of painting. Rousseau saw men and things differently from us.*"

"Henri Rousseau," by Uhde, Paris, 1911.

"*Living under a discipline that demanded the immediate completion of a given task, he applied a corresponding discipline to his art. In this way he greatly increased his own power, basing it, conscientiously, on the principles of*

extreme care, and a desire to accomplish the uttermost, even the impossible. Every picture of Henri Rousseau's shows proud confidence in his capabilities, extreme skill in composing, and infallible balance and proportion. His art is not an abridged formula, nor a facile eclecticism, nor a blatant expressiveness. It is a vision imposed by an imagination of unquenchable intensity, seeking only its own expression, a definite radiance disengaging itself from the ardent desire to serve his subject to the utmost of his power, and in doing this to choose the straight road from which there is no wandering. His genius lies in the even quality that is in every one of his works; throughout the surface of each of his canvases is manifest the inexhaustible love, patience and will that guides his brush. Never is there any culpable looseness of handling, never do we find a desire to appear to have accomplished, without having made, to the uttermost, the joyous sacrifice that such accomplishment demands. Thus the concentrated quality of the pictorial values of his pictures is such that even their remotest corners show the imprint of the burning solicitude with which he enveloped them.

"Henri Rousseau invented his own methods. His pictures are his dreams as the character of his brain ordained he should reveal them. But at the same time he had the highest respect for his mighty predecessors. His poverty would not permit him to wander past narrow boundaries, even beyond his Parisian suburb, but his imagination, his taste for the miraculous bore him beyond these limits towards the inaccessible, the farthest, the most beautiful, the most exacting.

"His art, popular as was its origin, could never, by a contradiction which may be forgiven me, in this case, make an appeal to other than the loftiest and most sensitive

intelligence. The phenomena of distortions that were caused by his desire for conventional beauty, and his instinctive tendency to pass the limits of his pictorial conception will always render him grotesque in the eyes of the vulgar. In his pictures we shall find human hands sometimes outrageously large, and at others apparently grotesquely small, and in a like way we find the limbs are stark and straight where we should expect them bent. We see, in the foreground, fragments that were once destined to be in the background. We shall, moreover, find one characteristic that is ever present in Rousseau's work; every object he paints is a symbol, and a symbol only, the essence of that which he proposes to represent, and despite its apparent realism, it lives beyond the atmosphere of his pictures, and, because of this, only to the élite can the significance of his work be accessible.

"*The history of Art will mark his work as the coming of a new greatness. At a moment when Impressionism was providing a regrettable relaxation to the young artist, Henri Rousseau roused the tastes of the enlightened, roused their imagination, and induced in his age a realism of nobler aims in Art. He must be considered as one of France's greatest painters assured of immortality.*"

Roch Grey, "Action," Paris, May, 1921.

Henri Rousseau died in Paris in 1910.

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Catalogue

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1. "LA CARRIOLE DU PERE JUNIET"

Size : 38 ins. × 51 ins.

Exhibited at the "Exposition posthume Henri Rousseau."
Exhibited at the "Rétrospective des Indépendants," Grand Palais, Paris, 1926.

Signed + dated 1908

2. "SINGES DANS LA FORET"

Size : 45 ins. × 64 ins.

v. good
drawn

Exhibited at the "Rétrospective des Indépendants," Grand Palais, Paris, 1926.

Signed only
orange ones
v. gun foliage
Brown monkeys

3. "LA FORET EQUATORIALE"

Size : 55 ins. × 50½ ins.

From the Collection of Mr. Delaunay, Paris.

Signed + dated 1909
Blue green leaves
pink flowers l : white flowers r
Dk brown monkeys in foreground

4. "FLEURS

Size : 18¼ ins. × 13 ins.

Offered by the Artist to his fiancée on her birthday, July 5th, 1909.

1909

Exhibited at the "Rétrospective des Indépendants," Grand Palais, Paris, 1926.

5. "LA BOUGIE ROSE"

Size : 6¼ ins. × 8½ ins.

Exhibited at the "Exposition Henri Rousseau," Galerie Druet, Paris.

Signed

6. "PARIS, LA PASSERELLE DE PASSY"

Size : 14¾ ins. × 18 ins.

Exhibited at the "Rétrospective des Indépendants," Grand Palais, Paris, 1926.

Signed

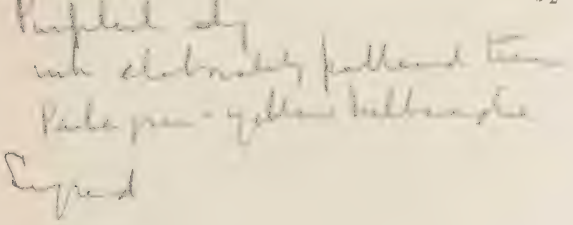
V. Wawe

Hanway A Howes, Herts

agny Blues

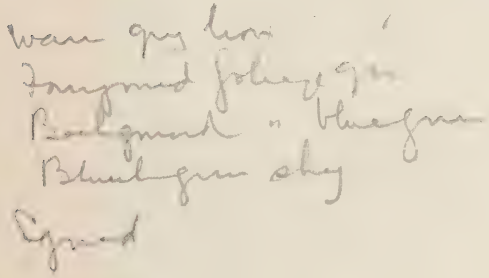
7. "BELLEVUE: EFFET D'AUTOMNE"

Size: $23\frac{1}{2}$ ins. × 19 ins.



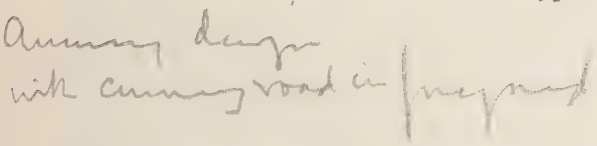
8. "LION DANS LA FORET"

Size: $14\frac{3}{4}$ ins. × $17\frac{3}{4}$ ins.



9. "PAYSAGE: BANLIEU DE PARIS"

Size: $9\frac{1}{2}$ ins. × $17\frac{3}{4}$ ins.



10. "LA CHASSE AU DESERT"

Size : $14\frac{3}{4}$ ins. × $17\frac{3}{4}$ ins.

11. "PALETTE"

(Oval) Size : 9 ins. × 6 ins.

Signed 'Henri' and dated : 26 Mai 1907.

12. "PORTRAIT DE MONSIEUR STEVEN"

Size : $7\frac{1}{2}$ ins. × 6 ins.

Exhibited at "Salon des Indépendants," Paris, 1906.
Exhibited at "Badische Kunsthallen" Karlsruhe (Germany).

NOTES

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